

Walker Technology College

Waverdale Avenue, Walker, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE6 4LA

Inspection dates

12–13 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In recent years' students' attainment has been low and the progress they make during their time in the college has not been good enough, including in the sixth form. The sixth form also requires improvement.
- Not enough has been done yet to make sure that all students leave college with good skills in English, particularly boys and students entitled to the pupil premium.
- Since his appointment the headteacher and governing body have set about transforming the college's work but it is too early to see the full impact of their work.
- Past teaching has not been consistently strong enough to make sure all students achieve as well as they can in all subjects.
- Teachers do not always vary tasks to match the different abilities of students in class so some students are not stretched enough and others find the work too difficult. Teachers sometimes talk for too long in lessons.
- Some teachers do not mark students' work well enough or make sure that the questions they ask help students to think about what they are doing. As a result students sometimes find it difficult to work things out for themselves.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders' focus on improving teaching is now making a difference in lessons. Poor teaching has been stamped out; most is good and some outstanding.
- The focus on improving mathematics has paid dividends. Results have moved from well below average in 2010 to slightly above in 2012. The gap in achievement between students entitled to the pupil premium and that of other students has narrowed well.
- Students speak well about the care and support adults give, especially in times of need. All parents who responded to the inspection survey report that students are safe, well cared for and behave well.
- Students say behaviour has been transformed. Students behave well in lessons and around college; they are polite, friendly and supportive of one another. There is a real sense of community when people enter. Students speak proudly about their new college and their loyalty to their 'houses' Dobson, Stephenson and Grainger.
- The college's new alternative provision for students who are at risk of being permanently excluded is already making a positive difference to their basic skills, attitudes and willingness to attend the provision regularly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 parts of lessons across the college, including lessons taught to the sixth form. Two lessons were jointly observed with members of the senior leadership team.
- Formal discussions were held with the headteacher, staff; members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team spoke to many students in lessons, at break and lunch times. They also spoke formally to three groups of students on the second day of inspection.
- Inspectors heard a number of students read in lessons, and in the special reading sessions that the college runs each morning before lessons and in registration periods.
- The inspection team observed the college’s work and looked at a range of documentation, including the college’s plans for the future and reviews of those plans, and the college’s records of their observations of teaching. They also looked at behaviour logs, racist incident logs and the college’s safeguarding arrangements.
- The inspectors took account of ten responses to Ofsted’s Parent View survey and 111 responses to the staff inspection survey.

Inspection team

Margaret Farrow HMI, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Lesley Powell	Additional Inspector
Pippa Jenkinson	Seconded Inspector
Mark Simpson	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this college

- Walker Technology College is an average size secondary college.
- The number of students who are eligible for the pupil premium is nearly double that found in other schools nationally. (This is funding available for students known to be eligible for free school meals, students in local authority care and those whose parents are in the armed forces).
- Although increasing, the number of students who come from minority ethnic communities remains well below average.
- The proportion of students who receive extra help at school action because of their special educational needs or disability is below average. The proportion of such students receiving extra help at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The college has the only Ministry of Defence funded Combined Cadet Force in the North-East (CCF) and also runs a college-based Football Academy led by a professional football player.
- The deputy headteacher with responsibility for learning and teaching has developed two off-site alternative provisions for students. 'Lookwide' is a programme for 12 students with significant social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. In September 2012 a new provision was developed for 12 students at risk of being excluded permanently. It is currently based in the local YMCA building but is moving to purpose-built accommodation in the New Year.
- Since the last inspection there have been a number of changes at Walker College. A new headteacher was appointed a year and a half ago. The college moved into new premises just over a year ago and the leadership team was completely restructured at that time.
- The college meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further across the college so all groups of students make at least good progress in English and weaker subjects by:
 - ensuring that teachers, including those that teach the sixth form, provide varied, interesting activities that are well-matched to individual students' abilities
 - making sure that all teachers provide high quality marking and feedback so that students always know how to improve their work
 - ensuring that all teachers use probing questions in lessons to check on students' understanding, help them work things out for themselves and to encourage them to develop their ideas further
 - making sure that teachers do not spend too much time talking in lessons so students have time to develop independent learning and research skills and to solve problems in groups or in pairs.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Published information and college data for summer 2012 shows the number of students gaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has improved over the past three years. The gap between how well students do in Walker Technology College and students in other colleges is narrowing but results are still below average. This is in part due to low results in English, although results in subjects like history, geography and design and technology are also too low.
- In the past students' progress has not been good enough. Boys, students entitled to the pupil premium and students requiring additional help to support their special educational needs made slow progress. However, the gap between the average point score of students entitled to the pupil premium and that of other pupils is narrowing in English and is now similar to the gap in England as a whole.
- Actions taken by the headteacher are helping students make faster progress in English lessons. Year 9 students' progress has been swiftest as this is the group who have benefitted most from the changes put in place.
- Mathematics results are improving at a faster rate and in 2012 were broadly average. Students made expected progress from their starting points in Year 7. Lower-ability students and those entitled to the pupil premium made good progress because there is now more support for them.
- Students enter the sixth form with lower than average qualifications. Their progress has been patchy according to the qualifications they took. In 2012, students made better progress in all qualifications and their progress is now similar to that of students in other sixth forms nationally.
- Students' work books, teachers' regular checks on their progress and lesson observations show that students in all year groups are now making better progress in their lessons. This is because of the improvements made to teaching. There are still some lessons where students' progress is held back because work is not always challenging enough for them or set at the right level.
- Improvements in the way the college supports students with a disability or who have special educational needs, including the way teachers check their progress and the additional support they get, is starting to make a positive difference to these students' progress in lessons.
- Since September, a good range of actions has been put in place to improve the reading skills across the college and particularly of younger students. 'Daily Rise and Read' sessions, accelerated reading programmes and reading sessions for all in tutor time are just a few examples of activities that are helping students to gain a joy of reading and helping them to catch up from their often lower than average reading skills on entry into Year 7.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is getting better due to senior leaders' determined actions to improve it. Most teaching is good, some is outstanding but there is not enough consistently good teaching in every class and in all subjects to make sure all students achieve well.
- Some things are good in all lessons like students' behaviour and positive attitudes. Students come to lessons promptly and ready to learn; even in more mundane lessons students remain well-behaved. Good relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves add to the generally calm atmosphere in classes. Behaviour is managed well.
- In most lessons, teachers' good knowledge of their subject and use of careful questions build students' knowledge, understanding and skills successfully. In one mathematics lesson, the teacher's open questions were used well to tease out what students knew and then challenge them to think things out for themselves. This helped to develop students' problem-solving skills and confidence to have a go on their own. This is not always the case and this is hindering the progress of some students.
- In good lessons teachers make sure that students work at a brisk pace. Teachers use different

equipment to keep students interested and use the information they have about students' current levels of ability to set varied activities matched to these starting points. Such good strategies are not fully in place in all lessons so sometimes more-able students are not stretched enough and some less-able students find the work too difficult.

- Sometimes teachers' helpful marking and feedback makes sure that students know exactly how well they are doing, what needs to be corrected and what they need to do to reach their next level. This good practice is not in place in all classes yet; therefore students are sometimes unsure about what they have done correctly and what they could do better.
- Older students say they get good feedback from their 'quality marking' sheets when they do a test or assessment. Younger students say that marking is sometimes good, but it depends on the teacher and a few think that books are not always marked quickly enough.
- Improvements in the way teachers assess and prepare work for students in the sixth form are helping students to make better progress in lessons. However, target grades do not always match students' current capabilities and therefore students are not always pushed hard enough.
- Sixth-form students value the new restructured pastoral system. It is beginning to make sure that students' academic progress, attendance and well-being are being more closely checked and this is supporting current improvements in students' progress in lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' good behaviour stands out as they move around the college, sixth form and in lessons. Students say behaviour has been much better since they came to the new college and because the recent rewards and sanctions behaviour policy is used fairly. They like the way the college celebrates their good behaviour and attitudes in and out of lessons.
- Sixth-form students' attitudes to lessons are very positive. They speak enthusiastically about the college and their roles within it. They like the spaces that are dedicated to their year group.
- Every effort is made to help students remain in college when behaviour becomes a big problem. Students know exclusion is the last resort and the number excluded is low. The recent alternative provision in the YMCA for some of the most challenging students is well-managed and is already developing students' social, emotional and academic skills effectively.
- In discussions with inspectors, students report that they feel very safe in and around college. They know about risks to their own safety through what they learn in lessons, and through the good support from the highly effective pastoral team and other adults.
- Students are supported particularly well in times of great crisis in their lives. Case studies show how staff work closely with other agencies and families to help overcome their problems.
- Students are taught well about all forms of prejudice-based bullying and records show that bullying, racist and homophobic incidents are very rare and dealt with well. Students say they like the new 'on-line bullying' reporting tool on the college's website because they know adults will take quick action on any concerns. All parents responding to the Parent View survey report that their children are safe and bullying is tackled well.
- Attendance rates in past years have been rising steadily but have been too low. A wide range of actions has been put in place to improve matters. For example, an attendance bus now goes out each morning with a group of support workers and staff to help students get to college on time and to tackle some of the reasons why students have not set off for college.
- Actions are improving attendance this term and for the proportion of students absent for long periods. The number of students regularly absent has reduced significantly.

The leadership and management are good

- Since his appointment, the headteacher and governing body have taken decisive actions to improve many areas of the college's work. They have appointed a strong senior team that have driven improvement in a carefully considered way. This is making a difference to the quality of

teaching and to students' progress in many lessons. Senior leaders know there is still much more to do to make sure that all students achieve as well as they can.

- The problem in mathematics has been sorted out through better teaching. Actions have been checked regularly to make sure they have made a difference. Effective use is made of early entry into GCSE examinations. Students gain a grade in Year 10 then work on getting a better grade in Year 11. Students in Year 10 think this is helping them to strive for a better result.
- A lot of things have been done recently to improve English and other subjects that are not as good as they should be. This includes the appointment of additional staff, reading programmes and resources specifically designed to help students who are entitled to the pupil premium to catch up with the other students in the college. College data show that actions are beginning to narrow the gap.
- Middle managers speak of a step change in the college's leadership and they share the headteacher's ambition to become a good college. Staff are developing their skills to help drive improvements through training to improve the quality of teaching, sharing good practice in college and through sharper management of their performance in class.
- All teachers now have challenging targets to improve students' progress. Targets are regularly checked and if not met, teachers do not move up their pay scales. As a result of actions taken, poor teaching has been eradicated. Where teaching needs improving, time-limited action plans are developed with the teacher. This is helping to increase the number of good lessons and students' better progress in lessons.
- Local authority college improvement staff provide senior leaders with rigorous challenge. This supports their understanding of where the college's strengths and weaknesses lie. As a result, self-evaluation is accurately identifying things that are working well and things that need to be better. From this work clear improvement plans and targets are developed and checked regularly by the senior team and the governing body in order make sure that there is a good pace to improvement.
- Regular systems for tracking how well students are doing have been put in place across the college including the sixth form and the alternative provision. This information is being used to challenge teachers when students' progress is not good enough and to target additional support for students at risk of falling behind. Some teachers are still not using this information well enough to plan lessons that are carefully matched to students' current levels of ability.
- The curriculum is constantly being adapted to try to meet the needs and interests of students and changing national requirements. It is boosted well by a wide range of out of college activities which, along with the curriculum, support students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities like the cadet force, residential visits, charity work for Project Africa, volunteering work and international exchanges extend students' awareness of cultures and faiths beyond Walker College.
- **The governance of the college:**
 - The governing body has sharpened up its role since the last inspection and shares the headteacher's passion to make Walker Technology College into a good college. Governors have always ensured strong safeguarding and financial management arrangements but they are now more successfully involved in checking the quality of teaching, and the performance management of staff. For example, they have worked with the headteacher to tackle underperformance of teachers by improved performance management. This has ensured that staff progress through pay scales only when they consistently deliver good quality teaching. Governors carefully check the progress of all pupils including those who are supported using the pupil premium. Actions taken have improved results in mathematics and in lessons generally. However they have yet to make sure that students who are supported by the pupil premium catch up from their low starting points in English. This is why the governors have taken action this year to provide additional staff so that these students can work in smaller groups and have introduced the many different programmes and activities to help this group of students to make better progress.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	108525
Local authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	400989

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1080
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Wood
Headteacher	Mike Collier
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2009
Telephone number	0191 2958660
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